

The Magi

Matthew 2:1-12

This event is recorded for us for a variety of reasons, it would appear; but one of reasons is that it occasioned one of the fulfillments of prophecy – the killing of the male children 2 years of age and younger. One of the most important teachings of Scripture, and one that is often overlooked, is the fact that if even one portion of one prophecy had not been fulfilled to the letter then all that we know of God and the Bible would be suspect, and would cause speculation on the entirety of recorded Scripture. It was vital that this story be here in order for us to have yet another fulfilled prophecy to point to as proof that Jesus was Who He said He was and did what He said He would do.

A further in-depth study of the visit of the wise men will show that there were other valuable truths to learn from this event in Jesus' life.

I. WHO WERE THEY? – VS. 1

A. "Wise men"

1. The word for "wise men" is where we get the word "magi" from (that's why it's called "the visit of the Magi") – it's the root of our word "magician."
2. For that reason, some have considered these men to be less than honorable.
3. However, the word didn't mean then what it does now – that's why it was translated "wise men" rather than "magicians" – they

were considered to be the philosophers, the educators, the scientists of their day.

B. "From the east"

1. It is unclear what this refers to so one can only speculate.
2. The fact that it took them so long to get there would indicate that they traveled a long distance.
3. Most evangelical theologians believe they were from Persia (modern-day Iran) – a place known then for its "wise men."

"The Jews believed that there were prophets in the kingdom of Saba and Arabia, who were of the posterity of Abraham by Keturah; and that they taught in the name of God, what they had received in tradition from the mouth of Abraham." - Whitby. That many Jews were mixed with this people there is little doubt; and that these eastern magi, or philosophers, astrologers, or whatever else they were, might have been originally of that class, there is room to believe. These, knowing the promise of the Messiah, were now, probably, like other believing Jews, waiting for the consolation of Israel. (Adam Clarke)

C. "To Jerusalem"

1. They came to the capital of the nation because they figured that's where the king would be born (they were looking for "the King of the Jews").

2. They didn't expect Him to be born in a small, unknown town.
3. This was done in order for the aforementioned prophecy to be fulfilled.

II. WHY HAD THEY COME? – vs. 2

A. "Seen his star in the east"

1. Apparently, they were observant enough of the heavenly bodies to know that something unusual had occurred.
2. They were also equally knowledgeable in Old Testament writings, for they seem to have been looking for something to occur about this time.
3. How did they know it was "His star?" It doesn't say, but it would be safe to assume that they were spiritual to the extent that the Holy Spirit spoke to them to tell them that's what it was.

Numbers 24:17

¹⁷ I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

Luke 1:78-79

⁷⁸ Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

⁷⁹ To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Revelation 22:16

¹⁶ I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

B. "Come to worship him"

1. Again, this points to their spirituality.
2. They wouldn't have traveled all that way, spending up to two years just getting there, plus the time to get home, if they had not known there was something so very special about this baby.
3. "To worship" is what we are all to do – it is our way of recognizing who Jesus is.

Psalm 45:11

¹¹ So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.

John 9:38

³⁸ And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

III. WHAT WAS THE REACTION TO THEIR COMING? – VS. 3-8

A. Herod and all Jerusalem were "troubled" – vs. 3

1. They were "stirred up or agitated" at the news that a King had been born.
2. The Devil's crowd is still "stirred up or agitated" at the same news.

1 Kings 18:17-18

17 And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?

18 And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.

Acts 16:20–21

20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

Acts 17:6–7

6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

B. He then set out to destroy this "King of the Jews" – vs. 4-8

1. One thing to consider is that it was the religious crowd, the "theologians" of the day, that Herod consulted with.
2. It isn't entirely clear, but it is more than probable that these theologians, these Old Testament scholars, didn't have any malice in mind when they told Herod where Jesus was to be born – they were looking for Him as much, or maybe even more, than anyone else was.

3. Herod used every means at his disposal attempting to circumvent a “new king” from taking his throne – he didn’t care who it was, he just wasn’t willing to give up his throne to another.

IV. WHAT DID THEY DO WHEN THEY FOUND HIM? – vs. 9-12

A. They rejoiced – vs. 9-10

1. When they saw the final end of the star, they knew they had found what they were searching for.
2. And they were joyful – “with exceeding great joy” – “they had themselves a spell” as some would say – they were more than just excited about finding the Savior.
 - a) The word for “exceeding” is one that means vehemently, or in a high or great degree. It comes from a word that literally means “violent” – as if the production of this type of emotion is equivalent to that of being physically moved. This Greek word is translated “exceeding” in three other verses in the New Testament:

[Matthew 17:23](#)

²³ **And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again.** And they were exceeding sorry.

[Matthew 26:22](#)

²² And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

[Revelation 16:21](#)

²¹ And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

- b) "Great joy" is a common term for its day and means joy from within, as opposed to joy based on what's happening to us.
- c) They were apparently saddened by the departure of the star and the uselessness of their journey to this point, but once they saw the star again, they knew without question they would see Him "who is born King of the Jews," and words could not express what they felt.

Psalm 67:4

⁴ O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah.

Psalm 105:3

³ Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD.

Acts 13:46-48

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

⁴⁷ For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the

Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

Romans 15:9-13

⁹ And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

¹⁰ And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.

¹¹ And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.

¹² And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

¹³ Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

B. They worshipped Him – vs. 11

1. "Fell down" – position of humility and worship

Psalm 95:6

⁶ O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

2. "Presented him gifts" – this verse is one that many use to show that giving to the Lord is a form of worship – it's the Law of First Mention – the first mention of worship of our Savior is one that involves giving. It sets the precedence of Scripture, so to speak.

Psalm 72:10

¹⁰ The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.

Psalm 72:15

¹⁵ And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised.

Isaiah 60:6

⁶ The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.

These gifts were simply what these wise men considered appropriate, things they brought from their country to present to the royalty of another. Nothing more should be read into it than that. It can be made a type, but it wasn't – it was just showing their desire to be true to the culture of the day, and a form of worship in which they recognized that this Baby was more than just a baby.

- a) "Gold" – the most precious of metals, the token and color of royalty.
- b) "Frankincense" - Frankincense is a white resin or gum. It is obtained from a tree by making incisions in the bark and allowing the gum to flow out. It is highly fragrant when burned, and was therefore used in worship, where it was burned as a pleasant offering to God. It is found in the East Indies, but chiefly in Arabia; and hence it has been supposed probable that the wise men came from Arabia.

Exodus 30:8

⁸ And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

Leviticus 16:12

¹² And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil:

- c) "Myrrh" – perfume which exudes spontaneously or is procured by incisions made on a small thorny tree growing in Arabia and Ethiopia. These droplets soon hardened into a bitter aromatic gum which was highly prized by the ancient people for use in incense and perfumes. It is still used medicinally and in perfumes.

John 19:39

³⁹ And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.

Psalms 45:8

⁸ All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.

Song of Solomon 3:6

⁶ Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

Song of Solomon 5:5

⁵ I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.

Conclusion: A great deal happened in the life of these wise men, both before they headed out to follow the star, and then when they found the baby Jesus. Although we don't know for sure who they were, we can determine they were different after they met the Savior than when they left to find Him. That is true of everyone who finds Christ – they are different than they were before.

Are we like the wise men? After we found Him, are we changed? Are we more excited than we used to be? Do we worship and give to Him? These are all things we are supposed to be doing – Are we?